

Declaration of Roger Gaston

Roger Gaston declares, under penalty of perjury and pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1746:

1. My name is Roger Gaston.
2. I am sixty-six (66) years old and live in Eagle River, Alaska.
3. I live with my wife, Marlene J. Gaston, who is sixty-three (63) years old.

Marlene has a heart condition, as well as other physical disabilities.

4. My wife and I are both retired, and we live on a fixed income. We both receive social security.
5. We have received SNAP benefits for at least the past nine (9) years.
6. For the past two years, we have experienced long delays in obtaining our SNAP benefits. These delays have caused us significant financial stress. We are still recovering.

September 2022 through March 2023

7. In September 2022, we received a notification to recertify for SNAP. I emailed the recertification paperwork to DPA, as well as dropped off a paper copy in the drop box.
8. Because we received our benefits in October 2022, I assumed that our recertification application was approved.
9. However, we did not receive SNAP in November 2022. I tried to contact DPA to figure out the issue. It took me three days to reach someone.
10. On the first day, I called DPA at approximately 8 am. I waited on hold all day. In the late afternoon, the call was disconnected. I redialed but had lost my place in line, so I hung up.

11. On the following day, I again called DPA at approximately 8 am. I waited on hold all day. At 5 pm, I disconnected the call because I knew the DPA office would be closing.

12. On the third day, I decided to go to DPA in person. I drove to the Anchorage office, arriving at about 7:30 am. There were already about 60 people waiting in line outside the door.

13. I stood in line for about two hours. I then learned that about 120 people were already waiting inside and DPA would be unable to speak with anyone else, so I drove home.

14. While I went in person, my wife tried to reach DPA by phone. After waiting on hold for several hours, she was able to speak with someone. They told her that DPA had received our application, but it had not been processed. We also learned that there was a large backlog.

15. We did not begin receiving our SNAP benefits again for almost five (5) months.

16. This was a very difficult period. We eliminated every non-essential expense, maxed out our credit cards, and asked family members for assistance. But we still struggled to survive. We had to choose which bills to pay. For example, we could not afford to both put food on the table and pay our heating bill.

17. Without SNAP assistance, we also could not afford my wife's heart medication. My wife depends on the medication, and she could become very sick without it. We had to ask our daughter to purchase it. I felt humiliated that, to provide for my wife, I had to turn to my children, who have their own families to care for.

18. In March 2023, we began receiving SNAP again. We also received assistance for the intervening months between November 2022 and March 2023. But, because those funds may only be used for food products, we could not use the "backpay" to catch up on our other bills.

19. During this period, we decided that we could no longer afford to live in Anchorage. We moved to Eagle River, where our daughter lives.

October 2023 through Present

20. In October 2023, DPA notified us that it was again time to recertify. I submitted the paperwork electronically a few weeks later, as well as placed a paper copy in the drop box.

21. We continued to receive SNAP through December 2023. However, in January 2024, we did not receive SNAP.

22. I tried to call DPA. I had to wait on hold for several hours in order to speak with someone.

23. DPA told me that my application had been received but it had not been processed.

24. I called again about two weeks later. I again waited on hold for a long time, and I was again told that my application had not been processed.

25. We did not receive benefits in February 2024 either. I called DPA and went through the same process—a long wait time, followed by no update on our application.

26. Ultimately, we received our benefits on February 23, 2024.

27. During this period, we again had to choose which bills to pay. We purchased groceries with the money we had originally planned to put toward our electric bill. However, if the delay had continued, I do not know how we would have afforded groceries come March. Our pantry was empty.

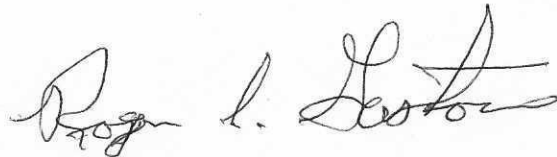
Long-Term Impact

28. The delays we experienced in obtaining our SNAP benefits caused us an immense amount of financial stress. We are still recovering, particularly from that first five-month stretch.

29. Because we fell so far behind in our bills between November 2022 and March 2023, I decided to take out a \$1,800 loan in order to pay our outstanding debts. I am still repaying the loan today. Before I retired, we had no debt.

30. We were able to survive—but that is all we did.

Dated: March 26, 2024
Eagle River, Alaska

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Roger L. Gaston", written in black ink.

Roger Gaston